Russian Revolutionary Terrorism, British Liberals, and the Problem of Empire (1884-1914)

Abstract

Britain in the fin de siècle was home to many significant communities of political émigrés. Among Russian revolutionaries who made London their home were Sergei Stepniak and Feliks Volkhovskii, forced to flee Russia as a result of their revolutionary activities in the 1870s. Britain became a symbol of liberty in their writings as a source of comparison with tsarist rule. These comparisons also supported their justifications of the use of terrorism by Russian revolutionaries when writing for audiences with concerns about the use of terrorism in Britain. The emphasis on Russian otherness in these comparisons also helped to justify their opposition to Russian imperialism, while at the same time praising a benevolent imperialism rooted in social and cultural activism. Their thought represents a blending of liberal and socialist ideas employed to place the Russian experience beyond the scope of modernity and liberal political understanding.

Keywords

Russian revolutionaries, terrorism, British Empire, Ireland, Panslavism, liberty

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Introduction

Britain, to Russian revolutionary émigrés, was a place both real and imagined as a home of liberty. Individuals such as Sergei Stepniak and Feliks Volkhovskii could live, write, publish, and campaign beyond the reach of the tsarist censors and political police. It also functioned as an example of liberty in practice, with its parliamentary political system, opportunities for civic activism, and protections for individual rights. Not only were ideas of political liberty important in their writings of the period of their lives in emigration, but they also engaged with questions of empire and the state. The ideas they proposed in this period were inflected with the heritage of the socialism of Russian *narodniks* of the 1870s, but also with ideas they encountered among the liberal circles in which they moved in Britain.

Stepniak and Volkhovskii established networks which supported their work on various projects, principal among which was the Russian Free Press Fund. The Fund collaborated with their foreign sympathisers in the English and American Societies of Friends of Russian Freedom, to publish the newspaper *Free Russia* and other literature and campaign against the tsarist regime. Stepniak and Volkhovskii used the opportunity to write for new audiences, their articles appearing in journals such as the *Contemporary Review* and newspapers such as *The Times*. Many aspects of the work of Stepniak (the revolutionary pseudonym of Sergei Kravchinskii), Volkhovskii, their revolutionary colleagues, and their sympathisers carried out in Britain have been exposed. Their revolutionary ideas have often been interpreted within the context of their *narodnik* heritage and their efforts to unite the revolutionary emigration across partisan lines, with less attention to their interactions with foreign sympathisers as influencing their writings. The question of empire is also little studied, except in reference to Ukraine.[1] Stepniak arrived in London in 1884, followed by Volkhovskii in 1890 after his escape from exile in Siberia, and the Fund was formed in 1891, comprising colleagues who had worked together in Russia and Switzerland in the 1870s. Alongside Stepniak and Volkhovsky, the other members of the Fund were Nikolai Chaikovskii, Lazar Goldenberg, and Leonid Shishko. Volkhovskii's writing has been less well-studied that Stepniak's work, although he played an important role in the activities of the Fund and as a respected figure of the transnational Russian revolutionary emigration in his own right. As Donald Senese commented: 'The great difficulty in coming to an appreciation of Volkhovsky's work in London is that it was done in Stepniak's shadow.'[2] Although Stepniak died in 1895, his ideas also echoed as his works were posthumously republished alongside previously unpublished works. Until his death in late 1914, Volkhovskii remained a respected member of the Russian revolutionary movement abroad, linking the

[1] For example, see: Barry Hollingsworth, 'The Society of Friends of Russian Freedom: English Liberals and Russian Socialists, 1890-1917', *Oxford Slavonic Papers*, vol. 3 (1970), pp. 45-64; James W. Hulse, *Revolutionists in London: A Study of Five Unorthodox Socialists* (Oxford, 1970); John Elliot Bachman, 'Sergei Mikhailovich Stepniak-Kravchinskii: A Biography from the Russian Revolutionary Movement on Native and Foreign Soil' (PhD dissertation, The American University, 1971); Gary Michael Hamburg, 'The London Emigration and the Russian Liberation Movement: The Problem of Unity, 1889-1897', *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, vol. 25, no. 3 (1977), pp. 321-39; John Slatter, 'Stepniak and the Friends of Russia', *Immigrants & Minorities*, vol. 2, no. 3 (1983), pp. 33-47; Donald Senese, 'S. M. Kravchinskii and the National Front Against Autocracy', *Slavic Review*, vol. 34, no. 3 (1975), pp. 506-22; Donald Senese, 'Felix Volkhovsky in London, 1890–1914', *Immigrants & Minorities*, vol. 2, no. 3 (1983), pp. 67-78; Donald Senese, *S.M. Stepniak-Kravchinskii: The London Years* (Newtonville MA, 1987).

[2] Senese, 'Felix Volkhovsky in London', p. 77

work of the Fund to later activism. He and other members of the Fund were among the founding members of a predecessor organisation to the Socialist Revolutionary Party. The Agrarian Socialist League was formed after the funeral of revolutionary theorist Peter Lavrov in Paris in 1900. Shishko, Volkhovskii, and Lazarev formed the League in conjunction with Viktor Chernov and Mikhail Gots, who would later become the leader of the Socialist Revolutionary Party and its terrorist wing, respectively. The League published a number of pamphlets which were distributed in Russia by the Party's networks.[3]

There were Russian émigré communities across fin de siècle Europe, but many countries were becoming less hospitable towards foreign revolutionaries in this period. A number of Russian revolutionaries, liberals, and political oppositionists were favourably received in Britain in the decades prior to the First World War.[4] Geneva and Paris remained important centres, despite enmity leading to the expulsion of the Russian anarchist Peter Kropotkin from Switzerland and his imprisonment in France in the early 1880s. Kropotkin later decided to settle in London after his release. Tsarist agents, working with local police, harassed members of the Russian community in Paris.[5] Stepniak arrived in London in 1884 feeling increasingly insecure.[6] Britain's lack of extradition treaty with Russia was both an important symbol of political liberty as well as a source of reassurance, which Stepniak would later attribute entirely to campaigns against the tsarist regime such as his own.[7] While London's police did collaborate with tsarist agents, it had a long history as a home for Russian and other European émigrés. Important publishing ventures were instigated in London, including Alexander Herzen and Nikolai Ogarev's newspapers *Kolokol* (*The Bell*) and *Poliarnaia Zvezda* (*The Polar Star*) in the 1850s and early 1860s. Herzen founded his Free Russian Press in London in 1853, with Ogarev joining him from 1856. *Kolokol* was one of the most long-lasting regular Russian émigré publications of the late-nineteenth century.[8] Radical political émigrés frequently cooperated across national lines, including speaking at the same meetings, and met with each other socially.[9] Russian revolutionaries such as Vladimir Lenin, sought out the British Museum's Reading Room to research and write.[10] Revolutionaries were largely unaffected by efforts such as the 1905 Alien's Act, which

[3] See Hannu Immonen, *The Agrarian Program of the Russian Socialist Revolutionary Party, 1900-1914* (Helsinki, 1988), p. 29 and Maureen Perrie, *The Agrarian Policy of the Russian Socialist-Revolutionary Party from its Origins through to the Revolution of 1905-7* (Cambridge, 1976), pp. 66-8.

[4] For examples, see: John Slatter, 'Jaakoff Prelooker and The Anglo-Russian', *Immigrants & Minorities*, vol. 2, no. 3 (1983), pp. 48-6, Ron Grant, 'G. V. Chicherin and the Russian Revolutionary Cause in Great Britain', *Immigrants & Minorities*, vol. 2, no. 3 (1983), pp. 117-38, David Saunders, 'Tyneside and the Making of the Russian Revolution', *Northern History*, vol. 21, no. 1 (1985), pp. 259-84, and Haia Shpayer-Makov, 'The Reception of Peter Kropotkin in Britain, 1886-1917', *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies*, vol. 19. No. 3 (1987), pp. 373-90.

[5] Fredric Zuckerman, 'Policing the Russian Emigration in Paris, 1880-1914: The Twentieth Century as the Century of Political Police', *French History and Civilisation*, vol. 2 (2009), pp. 218-27

[6] Edmund Downey, *Twenty Years Ago: A Book of Anecdote Illustrating Literary Life in London.....* (London, 1905), pp. 111-114. Downey described Sergei Stepniak's unease in continental Europe.; Stepniak's friend, the Danish writer Georg Brandes commented that England was the only refuge for political exiles. Georg Brandes, 'Vpechatlenie o Londone', in M.E. Ermasheva and V.F. Zakharin, *S.M. Stepniak-Kravchinskii v londonskoi emigratsii* (Moscow, 1968), p. 349

[7] Stepniak, 'Agitation Abroad', p. 73

[8] Helen Williams, 'Ringing the Bell: Editor-Reader Dialogue in Alexander Herzen's Kolokol', *Book History*, vol. 4, no. 1 (2001), p. 117

[9] See: Constance Bantman, *The French Anarchists in London, 1880-1914: Exile and Transnationalism in the First Globalisation* (Liverpool, 2013), pp. 72-102

[10] Robert Henderson, 'Russian Political Emigrés and the British Museum Library', *Library History*, vol. 9, nos. 1-2 (1991), pp. 59-68

targeted xenophobia towards poorer immigrant communities, such as Jews driven out of the Russian Empire by antisemitic violence.[11] Instead, the government legislated against criminal aspects of revolutionary activity, such as making explosives.[12] In Britain, Russian émigrés were only occasionally prosecuted and imprisoned under pressure from the tsarist government.[13]

Willing to embrace a range of political ideas, Stepniak and Volkhovskii saw their immediate goal as substantial social and economic reform, which could be achieved through political change. Although they never managed to unite the political opposition in Russia in order to accelerate change, they made serious efforts in this direction. Indeed, Stepniak was on his was to visit Volkhovskii to discuss establishing a new liberal and non-partisan journal when he was killed in a railway accident.[14] They remained, committed to spreading socialism.[15] Seeing social and economic reform as imminently necessary, they embraced different forms of revolutionary activity. The introduction of new concepts into their political thought indicates both their interactions with their foreign sympathisers but also their need to confront many of the issues they encountered in emigration, particularly concerning terrorism and empire. Through engaging with their foreign sympathisers, Stepniak and Volkhovskii articulated anew their revolutionary programme and their views of the post-revolutionary state.

Britain as a Model of Liberty

Britain was a safe haven for Stepniak and Volkhovskii as well as the best source of support for their cause in Europe. Despite efforts to publicise their cause beyond Britain, including with a short-lived German language edition of their newspaper *Frei Russland*, little was achieved. No real efforts were made to attract French supporters, and Stepniak noted that: 'As to France, we can do without her.'[16] Instead, Stepniak saw the 'Anglo-Saxon race', as opposed to the populations of other European nations, as key supporters of their campaign who took action on their behalf.[17] The modernisation of nineteenth-century Russia had fostered a growing centralised bureaucracy.[18] According to Stepniak and Volkhovskii, however, the centralised state was inefficient in Russia.[19] Stepniak contrasted this condition with that of France, arguing that in the latter, a centralised government after the Revolution was the only possible form of rule.[20] While French theorists were among the thinkers whom

[11] Bernard Porter, 'The British Government and Political Refugees, c.1880–1914', *Immigrants & Minorities*, vol. 2, no. 3 (1983), p. 26
[12] Porter, 'British Government and Political Refugees', p. 31
[13] See: Bernard Porter, 'The Freiheit Prosecutions, 1881-1882', *Historical Journal*, vol. 23, no. 4 (1980), pp. 833-56 and Robert Henderson, *Vladimir Burtsev and the Struggle for a Free Russia: A Revolutionary in the Time of Tsarism and Bolshevism* (London, 2017), pp. 70-99
[14] Bachman, 'Sergei Mikhailovich Stepniak-Kravchinskii', p. 420
[15] Stepniak, 'What is Wanted', in *Nihilism as it is* (London, [1894]), p. 23. This volume contained translations of two of Stepniak's pamphlets, the letter sent by *Narodnaia volia* to Tsar Alexander III in 1881 after the assassination of his father, the 'Programme' of Russian liberals, and Volkhovskii's pamphlet 'The Claims of the Russian Liberals', together with an introduction by Robert Spence Watson.
[16] Stepniak, 'Agitation Abroad', p. 75; Stepniak had previously expressed similar views: Stepniak to Robert Spence Watson, 14 April 1890. Spence Watson Weiss Papers, SW1/17/91, Newcastle University Special Collections
[17] Stepniak, 'Agitation Abroad', p. 75
[18] Alexei Miller, 'The Romanov Empire and the Russian Nation', in Stefan Berger and Alexei Miller (eds), *Nationalizing Empires* (Budapest, 2015), pp. 309-68
[19] 'Imperial Socialism', *Free Russia*, December 1891, p. 12
[20] Stepniak, *Russia Storm-Cloud*, pp. 83-4

they looked to as inspirations for their socialism, they did not claim the direct heritage of the French Revolution.[21]

Stepniak and Volkhovskii used comparisons between Britain and the state of liberty in Russia to attract foreign sympathisers to the cause. Scandals such as massacres at Iakutsk and Kara captured the attention of foreigners and inspired protests.[22] Stepniak claimed conditions in Russian prisons were beyond those imaginable by an Englishman.[23] He also noted that political prisoners in Siberia were treated more harshly than other prisoners, despite their crimes only relating to propaganda activity.[24] These comparisons served to highlight the injustice perpetrated by the tsarist regime against its political opponents. Images of the political prisoner and exile remained significant tropes in representations of tsarist injustice. When famous former prisoners of the period such as Vera Figner and Ekaterina Breshko-Breshkovskaia prisoners visited Europe and America, they were greeted with interest and sympathy.[25] Stepniak and Volkhovskii viewed the association of tsarist injustice with the Siberian prison and exile system as the foundation of broader support for the anti-tsarist cause. Writing about the Societies of Friends of Russian Freedom, Stepniak noted:

> Neither society confines itself to protesting against special instances of Russian tyranny, such as the Siberian horrors and the brutal treatment of political prisoners in exile, although these are the things which make the strongest impression upon foreigners. The societies hold a wider view of their work; and, believing that the root of the mischief lies in the autocracy itself, have set before themselves as an aim the support from without of those who are fighting against the autocracy within the country.[26]

He cautioned his readers, as always, that their real aim was an end to autocratic rule in Russian, which was the true enemy of liberty. Nevertheless, Stepniak proposed establishing a constitutional monarchy to allow the autocratic system to 'decay'.[27]

This comparison of the treatment of political prisoners was rooted in the contrast between their perceptions of 'individual liberty', as Stepniak referred to it, in Britain and Russia.[28] Conscription and military service were important examples of the tsarist regime's violation of individual rights in both their writing for foreign and Russian audiences.[29] Stepniak attributed the Russian military defeats during the Crimean war to the 'political system', which led to corruption and maltreatment of soldiers, indicating a comparison with

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[21] Stepniak, *Underground Russia*, p. 14

[22] Robert Henderson, 'The Hyde Park Rally of 9 March 1890: a British Workers' Response to Russian Atrocities', *European Review of History*, vol. 21, no. 4 (2014), pp. 451-466

[23] Stepniak, *Russia under the Tzars*, p. 146

[24] Ibid., pp. 122-39

[25] Figner visited England in 1909 during the campaign against the tsar's planned visit. See: Kevin Grant, 'British Suffragettes and the Russian Method of Hunger Strike', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 53, no. 1 (2011), pp. 127-9.; Breshko-Breshkovskaia travelled in America, where she met with members of the Society of Friends of Russian Freedom, see: Jane E. Good and David R. Jones, *Babushka: The Life of Russian Revolutionary E.K. Breshko-Breshkovskaia (1844-1934)* (Newtonville MA, 1991), pp. 78-90

[26] Stepniak, 'Agitation Abroad', p. 56

[27] Stepniak, 'Terrorism in Russia and Terrorism in Europe', p. 330. See also: John Slatter, '"Revolutionary Constitutionalism" and the Opposition to Tsarism', *Slavonica*, vol. 2, no. 2 (1995), pp. 8-22

[28] Stepniak, *Underground Russia*, p. 4

[29] Stepniak, 'The Russian Army', *The Times*, 29 May 1885 and 18 August 1885; F. Volkhovskii, 'Delo generala Martynova', in Aleksandrov and F. Volkhovskii (eds), *O nashei sovremennoi armii* (Paris, 1914), p. 54; F. Volkhovskii, 'Vechnaia pamiat!', *Narodnoe delo. Sbornik*, no. 5, (1910), p. 23

the British army.[30] Conscription also remained linked to the hated institution of serfdom, when a landowner might have rid himself of a troublesome serf by having him conscripted into the army.[31]

Stepniak and Volkhovskii's work during their time in Britain intersected with other humanitarian campaigns. Freedom of religion and the treatment of religious minorities in the Russian Empire was another recurring theme in *Free Russia* and their writings for foreign audiences.[32] Quakers, in particular, embraced the cause of the persecuted Christian pacifist sect, the Doukhobors, self-identifying with a persecuted religious group and seeing the campaign fitting within their broader aims of international peace, seeing Russia as a source of aggression.[33] Prominent Quakers in the English Society of Friends of Russian Freedom included its president Robert Spence Watson and *Free Russia* publicised a fundraising appeal by members of the Society of Friends in its pages.[34] Spence Watson had long been involved in humanitarian work, having overseen the distribution of relief to non-combatants in the Franco-Prussian War on behalf of the Society of Friends.[35] He was also concerned with humanitarian issues in Ireland and the Liberal Party's efforts to solve them, indicating the breadth of his interests.[36] The intersecting campaigns and fundraising activities in *Free Russia* indicate an awareness on the part of Stepniak and Volkhovskii of the interests of their foreign sympathisers and of their understanding of the role of religious freedom in the British conception of the self.

In both Britain and America, the Russian revolutionary cause shared many sympathisers with Armenians living under Ottoman rule.[37] In *Free Russia*, articles about Armenia provided opportunities to highlight Russian issues. While Volkhovskii claimed that British liberals believing the tsarist government could safeguard the rights of Armenians showed they had been misled by tsarist rhetoric, a decentralised Russian state was presented as a potential solution to this problem.[38] British intervention was encouraged as a solution to the Armenian question.[39] Political revolution in Russia, therefore, could produce a state which, like Britain, could alleviate the suffering of national minorities in other empires, presented as evil and 'other'.

Decentralising the Russian state would also solve the problem of bureaucrats violating the liberties of Russia's people. According to Stepniak:

> All is done now by *tchinovniks* [bureaucrats]. Personally, a modern Tzar does no harm to anybody at all, and is just as quiet and inoffensive a person as any constitutional monarch. He has not given up his power; he is like a beast with strong teeth and murderous claws still, but he never uses them. He is now quite a tame, domesticated animal, who wears quite obediently the yoke of the courtier. With self-denial worthy of a better cause, he is serving as a screen to their misdeeds, exposing himself to all the just consequences of his assumed all-

[30] Stepniak, 'The Russian Army', *The Times*, 18 August 1885
[31] F. Volkhovsky, 'A New Lesson Wanted, *Free* Russia, 1 October 1899
[32] For example see: *Free Russia*, 1 February 1894, p. 12
[33] Luke Kelly, 'Christianity and Humanitarianism in the Doukhobor Campaign, 1895–1902, *Cultural and Social History*, vol. 13, no. 3 (2016), pp. 339-55
[34] 'Exodus of the Doukhobortsi', *Free Russia*, July-October 1898, pp. 57-8
[35] Percy Corder, *The Life of Robert Spence Watson* (London, 1914), pp. 110-1
[36] Dr. Spence Watson, 'England's Dealings with Ireland' (London, 1887)
[37] See also: Ann Marie Wilson, 'In the Name of God, Civilization, and Humanity: The United States and the Armenian Massacres of the 1890s', *Le mouvement social*, no. 227 (2009), p. 36
[38] F. Volkhovsky, 'Russia and Armenia: Befooling the Liberals', *Free Russia*, 1 December 1896, pp. 96-8; 'The Eastern Question', *Free Russia*, 1 November 1895, p. 93
[39] A.M., 'The Unsheathed Sword', *Free Russia*, 1 March 1896, pp. 29-30

> powerfulness which make his life miserable, his existence an eternal fear, his power a derision, his position a shame.[40]

In fact, Stepniak argued that tsars had never held much personal power in Russia, except that in the past they had been able to meddle more in politics through the ability to exile or execute anyone at will.[41] The problem was, as Volkhovskii too suggested, the tsar was unwilling to blame bureaucrats for abuses of power and poor administration of the empire.[42]

Local government would be an important site of the remaking of Russian politics in the imagination of Stepniak and Volkhovskii. *Zemstvos* as institutions of local government reflected the modernising efforts of Tsar Alexander II, having been established in 1864 as part of what have been called the 'Great Reforms', which had also liberated peasants from serfdom. *Zemstvo* assemblies involved elected representatives of the local population and they were given relatively limited and local responsibilities for economic development. However, in practice, their activities were limited through the myriad ways in which representatives of the central government might oppose their work.[43] Russians liberals of the early twentieth century would also look to the *zemstvo* as a method to reform the tsarist system through decentralisation.[44] Earlier Russian political thinkers such as Herzen and Nikolai Chernyshevskii had instead often looked to the peasant commune (*mir*) as an example of popular political and social engagement in Russia. The Russian anarchist Mikhail Bakunin saw the peasant commune as an example of proto-socialism already in existence, although he criticised its associations with tsarist hegemony.[45] Stepniak seems to have been influenced by Bakunin's emphasis on violent revolution over propaganda work and aversion to the peasant commune, but his emphasis on parliamentary systems and the *zemstvo* as the basis of future parliamentary democracy indicates somewhat of a divergence from Bakunin's views.[46] Stepniak concluded, that while the peasant commune was 'an excellent school', it had been 'transformed into a pack of galley slaves, each of whom endeavours to minimise his share of the burden and responsibilities.'[47] Instead, *zemstvo* members who petitioned the tsar for a representative legislature, were to Stepniak 'true patriots'.[48] Both Stepniak and Volkhovskii believed the *zemstvo* was limited by the supervision and control of state officials and corruption, which had led to the embezzlement of funds.[49] Activism

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[40] Stepniak, *Russia under the Tzars*, p. 366
[41] Ibid., p. 365
[42] Volkhovsky, 'Introduction', in von Samson-Himmelstierna, *Russia under Alexander III*, xvi
[43] Kermit E. McKenzie, '*Zemstvo* Organization and Role within the Administrative Structure', in Terence Emmons and Wayne S. Vunich (eds), *The zemstvo in Russia: An Experiment in Local Self-Government* (Cambridge, 1982), pp. 31-78
[44] See: Neil B. Weissman, *Reform in Tsarist Russia: The State Bureaucracy and Local Government, 1900-1914* (New Brunswick NJ, 1981)
[45] Mikhail Bakunin, *Statism and Anarchy*. Translated and edited by Marshall S. Shatz (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 209-14
[46] Richard Wortman, *The Crisis of Russian Populism* (Cambridge, 1967), pp. 15-6; Donald L. Senese, 'Bakunin's Last Disciple: Sergei Kravchinskii', *Canadian-American Slavic Studies,* vol. 10, no. 4 (1976), pp. 570-6
[47] Stepniak, *The Russian Peasantry*. Vol. 1 (London, 1888), p. 308 and Vol. 2 (London, 1888), p. 619 and p. 308
[48] Stepniak, *King Stork and King Log: A Study of Modern Russia*. Second edition. Vol. 1 (London, 1896), p. 67
[49] Stepniak, *Russia under the Tzars*, pp. 297-303; Felix Volkhovsky, 'Introduction', in H. von Samson-Himmelstierna, *Russia under Alexander III. and in the Preceding Period*. Translated by J. Morrison (London, 1893), xvi-xvii. Volkhovskii wrote an introduction for a translation of this book which presented a generally positive interpretation of the tsarist regime; Stepniak, *Russian Peasantry*. Vol. 1, p. 104

independent of the state was needed and *zemstvo*s could not rely on the autocratic tsar to keep any promises not to interfere.[50] Stepniak and Volkhovskii's views on the *zemstvo* were, therefore, less optimistic than those of Russian liberals. The *zemstvo* needed to fuse civic and political activism to become successful, an example seen in the work of many of their British sympathisers such as Elizabeth Spence Watson, who campaigned for women's suffrage and the peace movement and served as a Poor Law Guardian.[51]

Observing political life in Britain seems to have had some influence on Stepniak and Volkhovskii's views on civic activism and the role of the middle classes in revolutionary political activity. They had both participated in the mid-1870s action known as the 'movement to the people', in which activists had attempted to live and work alongside workers and peasants, while at the same time trying to educate them about socialism. This period of their lives forged networks which supported revolutionary activities long into the twentieth century.[52] This impetus seems to have had a profound impact on socialists in Britain, seemingly, for example, inspiring their friends and supporters Edward and Marjory Pease to perform similar work. Edward Pease had been involved in teaching in a night school for young working-class men and abandoned his career as a stockbroker in order to become a cabinet-maker and spread knowledge of socialism among workers in Newcastle-upon-Tyne. Marjory Pease taught at a Board School.[53] While these ideas may have inspired British socialists, the activist milieu in which Stepniak and Volkhovskii found themselves in emigration was populated by middle-class humanitarian and social campaigners and Stepniak sought to include similar groups in his vision for remaking society: 'We desire freedom for all Russians without distinction of party; and we are ready to defend it in the name of that universal sense of civic solidarity which lies outside of class-questions, and which exists in all advanced countries in proportion to the degree of their advancement.'[54] Stepniak suggested that merchants, the formerly 'despised' class in Russian society, were a force for reshaping urban life, which he presented as the 'centre of civilization'.[55] He unfavourably compared Russian merchants them to the European middle-classes, whom he saw as also possessing 'culture', though he believed this would soon be a part of Russian middle-class culture with the increasing levels of education in this social class. At the moment, the middle classes were incapable of thinking beyond their own narrow interests and turning on the tsar.[56] This idea suggests a shift away from an emphasis on encouraging revolution among the peasants, as both Stepniak and Volkhovskii had participated in during the 1870s.

The comparisons which Stepniak and Volkhovskii made between Britain and Russia provided the foundation for much of their campaigning as it was used to emphasise the brutality of the Russian regime. While Stepniak and Volkhovskii do not appear to have fundamentally altered their political positions, emigration nevertheless created the context for these comparisons. It is difficult to attribute the aspects of their thought which began to deviate from their previous revolutionary activism in Russia, particularly their focus on civic

[50] 'A Liberal Programme', *Free Russia*, 2 June 1896, p. 53
[51] Ann Craven, 'The Genteel Militant: Elizabeth Spence Watson's Work for Women's Suffrage and Peace', *North East History*, no. 47 (2016), pp. 73-86
[52] For example, see: Ben Eklof and Tatiana Saburova, 'In Pursuit of a Different Revolution: Russian Populists of the Seventies Generation in 1917', *Slavic Review*, vol. 76, no. 3 (2017), p. 686
[53] Pease's unpublished memoirs are held by the British Library: Edward R. Pease, *Some Recollections for my Sons* [1930/1953]
[54] Stepniak, 'What is Wanted', p. 37
[55] Stepniak, *The Russian Storm Cloud* (London, 1886), pp. 70-2
[56] Ibid., pp. 72-3

activism and local government institutions, to the influence of their new contacts among British liberals. However, the function of comparisons between Britain and Russia in their writing indicate that they generally held the British political system in high regard.

Britain and Russian Revolutionary Terrorism

Comparisons with Britain provided a foundation for legitimising the role of terrorism by Russian revolutionaries. Stepniak and Volkhovskii consciously othered Russia in their writings. Recognising the reservations that many foreigners had concerning terrorism, in emigration Stepniak presented himself as an observer to Mezentsev's death.[57] His fame did not derive from his terrorism, but rather his expertise. Lisa Stampnitzky has argued that 'terrorism' in the present day acquires meaning through the interaction between 'events, experts, and techniques of knowledge'.[58] Similarly, Stepniak and Volkhovskii established themselves as sources of news from Russia and they were perceived as experts because of their inner knowledge of the revolutionary movement. Lacking political rights, they claimed Russian revolutionaries were forced to use terrorism to obtain concessions from the government. Joseba Zulaika and William A. Douglass have suggested that the construction of the terrorist is always 'other'.[59] By placing terrorism outside of the British experience, Stepniak and Volkhovskii also made it comprehensible. They also carefully defined the role of political activism in emigration and that of foreigners supporting their activities. Stepniak emphasised that supporting the right to oppose the tsarist regime in Russia with violence did not mean that one was supporting violence in general or participating in it:

> we can join with Europeans as comrades, on a basis of mutual help, in a cause which we consider a quite general one. As for our Jingoes, indignant – perhaps even severely indignant – at such a league, we can afford to treat them with the same complete indifference with which we revolutionists treat the howls of the knights-errant of obscurantism in Russia. The analogy is complete.
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> …We must not confuse what is really the *lawful sanction* – or rather one sanction – of a movement with its true motive force. The *right* to take part in a particular struggle, the right to sacrifice for it time, money, or greater things, has never yet impelled a single human being to really take part in it, or really to sacrifice anything for its sake.[60]

Here Stepniak referred to his constant narrative: that revolutionary activity in Russia was necessary because it lacked legal channels for reform. Accordingly, Russia's unique condition required the use of force.[61] As such, Stepniak denied that Russian revolutionaries ('Nihilists') had repudiated all violence.[62] To abandon violence was to ignore the moral necessity that they had attached to violence. Terrorism was a response to the tsarist regime's 'organised injustice'.[63] The selection of targets of terrorism relied on the principle of tyrannicide. [64]

Terrorism in Russia, according to Stepniak and Volkhovskii, was a last resort. A pamphlet Stepniak had written after he had assassinated the head of the tsarist secret

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[57] Stepniak, *Underground Russia: Revolutionary Profiles and Sketches from Life* (London, 1883), p. 77

[58] Lisa Stampnitzky, *Disciplining Terror: How Expert Invented "Terrorism"* (Cambridge, 2013); See also: Michael J. Hughes, 'British Opinion and Russian Terrorism in the 1880s', *European History Quarterly*, vol. 41, no. 2 (2011), pp. 255-77

[59] Joseba Zulaika and William A. Douglass, *Terror and Taboo: The Follies, Fables, and Faces of Terrorism* (New York, 1996), x

[60] Stepniak, 'Agitation Abroad', pp. 63-4

[61] Stepniak, 'What is Wanted', p. 31

[62] S. Stepniak, 'Nihilism', *The* Times, 2 September 1885

[63] Stepniak, *Underground Russia*, p. 38

[64] For example, see: 'Pamiati Egora Sazonova', *Za narod,* no. 35, December 1910, p. 35

police, General Mezentsev, in 1878. *Smert za smert* (*A Death for a Death*) called for acts of terrorism against representatives of the tsarist regime. Stepniak argued that government actions had determined the use of terrorism:

> We, Russians initially were more than any other nation inclined refrain from political struggles and still more from bloody measures, which neither our history nor our upbringing/education could have taught us. The government alone has pushed us on to this bloody path, along which we have come. The government alone has put into our hands the dagger and the revolver.[65]

Despite arguing that terrorism in Russia was a legitimate form of revolutionary activism, Stepniak and Volkhovskii undertook to explain and justify past use of terrorism, but not to openly promote new terrorist acts. As émigrés, they felt it would be unjustified:

> In politics we are revolutionists, recognising not only popular insurrection, but military plots, nocturnal attacks upon the palace, bombs and dynamite. We shall not, while living abroad, preach these things to our Russian comrades. Apart from the moral impossibility of inciting others to actions in which we ourselves can take no part, there is also the question of the timeliness, and, therefore, of the expediency, of a given action – a question which can be decided only on the spot.
>
> But we regard all such acts as morally justifiable, and we are ready to defend them and acknowledge our moral solidarity with them, once people have been driven to commit them. In view of the cynical, boundless despotism now rampant in Russia, every form of protest is lawful, and there are outages upon human nature so intolerable that violence becomes the moral duty of the citizens.[66]

While the propaganda message on terrorism had shifted, they were nevertheless drawing on familiar tropes in Russian revolutionary culture. Russian literature of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries frequently depicted the relationship between terrorism and temporality. Although terrorists were often seen as impatient, their actions could also be interpreted in terms of timeliness.[67] Indeed, literary representations of terrorism were an important lens by which terrorists' aims and activities were refracted. Not only was this true of Russian observers, but also of English-speaking audiences, who consumed literature in translation or written by foreigners about Russian terrorists.[68]

Determining the legitimate use of terrorism in Russia also relied upon demonstrating why terrorism could not be justified in Britain. This did not meant that Stepniak and Volkhovskii were not uncritical of Britain. Stepniak criticised British Liberals and Radicals for thinking that society could be improved and revitalised through only 'making the laws more democratic and life more human'.[69] He acknowledged that the 1844 and 1850 Factory Acts had significantly improved the lives of working people, investigations into high death rates were required more frequently in British law, and that the School Board system and the Franchise Bill had the potential to grow the power of popular democracy.[70] But there

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[65] S. Kravchinskii, *Smert za smert (Ubiistvo Mezentseva)* (St Petersburg, 1920), p. 13

[66] Stepniak, 'What is Wanted', pp. 31-2

[67] Claudia Verhoeven, 'Time of Terror, Terror of Time: On the Impatience of Russian Revolutionary Terrorism (Early 1860s-Early 1880s)', *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, vo. 58, no. 2 (2010), pp. 254-73; Claudia Verhoeven, 'Oh Times, There Is No Time (But the Time that Remains): The Terrorist in Russian Literature (1863-1913)', in Thomas Austenfeld et. Al. (eds), *Terrorism and Narrative Practice* (Berlin, 2011), pp. 117-36

[68] Lynn Ellen Patyk, *Written in Blood: Revolutionary Terrorism and Russian Literary Culture, 1861-1881* (Madison WI, 2017); John Slatter, 'Bears in the Lion's Den: The Figure of the Russian Revolutionary Emigrant in English Fiction, 1880-1914', *Slavonic and East European Review*, vol. 77, no. 1 (1999), pp. 30-55

[69] Stepniak, *Russian Storm-Cloud*, pp. 209-10

[70] Ibid., p. 211 and p. 250

remained vast inequality, despite the nation's wealth. Unlike in Russia, Stepniak argued, the situation in Britain precluded the eruption of violence because there was a 'high standard of political freedom' in the country.[71] Whereas economic inequality would provoke revolution as a result of 'imperfect political freedom' in Russia, Stepniak was convinced that 'such a revolt can play but a secondary part in the large and organic process of social transformation by removing the obstacles to its free course…The social revolution is a task too complicated and difficult for the resources of an insurrection.'[72] As such, Stepniak placed Britain firmly outside the sphere of legitimate revolutionary violence, aligning with his claims that violence was necessary in Russia.

Nevertheless, foreign sympathisers could feel empathy for Russian revolutionaries driven to terrorism through their experiences. Stepniak's play, *Novoobrashchennyi* (*The New Convert*), written shortly before his death, suggested that anyone would support the terrorist cause, if they were only exposed to the truth about the tsarist regime.[73] This was depicted through the conversion of a man who was exposed to the values of the movement and saw the cruelty and self-interest of tsarist officials, while protecting and hiding his revolutionary daughter. Some supporters of the Fund, such as Mark Twain, declared that they too would have become terrorists if they had been Russian.[74] The conversion to militancy in Stepniak's play was mirrored in the activities of several members of the Society of Friends of Russian Freedom who were also members of the peace movement, who not only helped to fund publishing work but also funded and arranged the smuggling of weapons into Russia in the early years of the twentieth century.[75] Such representations of revolutionary conversion reflected the emphasis on the moral necessity of terrorism.

Justifying terrorism in Russia relied upon comparisons between Russia and Britain, however, also depended upon the argument that Britain could never be like Russia. This helped to avoid accusations that Russian revolutionaries were simply exporting terrorism and enabled it to become comprehensible in its unique political context.

Confronting Empire

As émigrés, Stepniak and Volkhovskii were forced to reckon with the political realities of the British Empire and, as revolutionaries, they were forced to confront the future of the Russian Empire. Consideration has been paid to Russian liberals of the early twentieth century who looked to the British Empire as a model for the effective administration of empire. Such liberals also saw the British Empire as a positive force, bringing peace and civilisation to those living under its rule.[76] Interpreting the Russian Empire as a benevolent force, existing outwith tsarist autocratic rule, provided a justification for the maintenance of the empire in the event of political change. Stepniak and Volkhovskii too looked to these ideas in the late nineteenth century, leading to a curious blending of liberal and socialist ideas. Liberal and

[71] Stepniak, *Russian Storm-Cloud*, pp. 216-7
[72] Ibid., p. 217
[73] The play was published in Russian in 1897 and in English translation in 1917.
[74] Louis J. Budd, 'Twain, Howells, and the Boston Nihilists', *New England Quarterly*, vol. 32, no. 3 (1959), pp. 351-71
[75] Raymond Challinor, 'Gun-Running from the North-East Coast, 1905-7', *Bulletin of the North-East Group for the Study of Labour History*, vol. 6 (1972), pp. 14-6
[76] Alexander Semyonov, 'Russian Liberalism and the Problem of Imperial Diversity', in M.P. Fitzpatrick (ed), *Liberal Imperialism in Europe* (Basingstoke, 2012), pp. 78-9; Alexander Semyonov, 'Mirrors of Imperial Imagination in Early Twentieth Century Russian Empire', in A. Nowak (ed), *Ofiary imperium, imperia jako ofiary: 44 spojrzenia = Imperial Victims, Empires as Victims: 44 Views* (Warsaw, 2010), pp. 147-51

socialist opinion on empire in Britain in the period was also diverse and interconnected. Among Stepniak and Volkhovskii's British sympathisers were also British socialists who views on empire were much more ambivalent than might be initially assumed. There were many socialists who criticised the capitalistic nature of empire, but did not suggest that the British Empire should cease to exist.[77] As such, Stepniak and Volkhovskii's writings on the subject of empire invite further analysis.

There is a sharp contrast in Stepniak and Volkhovskii's writings between the forms of empire in Russia. The centralised imperial order associated with tsarist rule was expansionist and threatened liberty in Europe was a core premise of Stepniak's 1886 book *The Russian Storm-Cloud*. The end to autocratic rule, decentralisation of administrative functions, and an emphasis on local self-government would counter this tendency within the Russian Empire. The vision of empire presented by Stepniak and Volkhovskii was a federalist one: 'We desire autonomy, local and regional; we desire a federalism which will render independent all those races and lands which make up the state.'[78] Indeed, Stepniak even argued that a centralised empire would also be impossible as a result of the fact that there were no strong centralising tendencies among personnel inside of the Russian government already.[79] It was perhaps then not even necessary to remove the individuals within the administration, simply to restructure it. Not only would decentralisation benefit political liberties, but it would also protect nationalities within the new state. In this respect, Stepniak was primarily influenced by his friend, the Ukrainian political theorist Mikhail Dragomanov, who proposed a vision of the federal empire was based on an increased role for cultural diversity.[80] Following Dragomanov, Stepniak proposed further division of the empire than by nationalities, meaning approximately nine subdivisions in Russia.[81] These proposals differed from those of the Imperial Federation League (founded in 1884), who envisaged a federal British Empire for which the main grounds were defence, although there were to be some centralised economic and administrative functions.[82] Irish nationalists had discussed federalist proposals in the early 1870s, but such ideas had fallen out of favour by the end of the decade.[83] Emphasis on cultural diversity and decentralisation reflects Stepniak and Volkhovskii's efforts to conceptualise a peculiarly Russian form of empire.

Although they focused on cultural diversity, they also ascribed the civilising mission to encounters within the Russian Empire, particularly in bringing Russian language, and thereby Russian culture, to Slavic-speaking peoples. According to Volkhovskii, tsarist rule was harming Bulgaria, though Russian culture and social activism had the potential to improve the country, particularly in the field of education. He also believed encouraging the use of Russian language could be beneficial as it would provide the opportunity to read Russian literature.[84] However, this activism was carried out by members of the intelligentsia, and by teachers and doctors, rather than by representatives of the tsarist regime. The despotic imperialism of the tsarist regime contrasted to the benevolent imperialism of activists.

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[77] Gregory Claeys, *Imperial Sceptics: British Critics of Empire, 1850-1920* (Cambridge, 2010), p. 226
[78] Stepniak, 'What is Wanted', p. 37
[79] Stepniak, *Russian Storm-Cloud*, p. 86
[80] Semyonov, 'Russian Liberalism', pp. 81-2
[81] Stepniak, *Russian Storm-Cloud*, p. 89
[82] Michael Burgess, *The British Tradition of Federalism* (Leicester, 1995), p. 66
[83] Colin W. Reid, '"An Experiment in Constructive Unionism": Isaac Butt, Home Rule and Federalist Political Thought during the 1870s', *English Historical Review*, vol. 129, no. 537 (2014), p. 359
[84] Volkhovsky, 'Introduction', in von Samson-Himmelstierna, *Russia under Alexander III*, xxxiii-xxxv

Russian imperialism had acquired a strongly negative image abroad which Stepniak and Volkhovskii capitalised upon in their writings. Popular outrage was fuelled by regularly-emerging news reports such as of the famine of 1891-2.[85] The uprisings of 1830 and 1863 in Poland were important catalysts for the development of anti-tsarist feeling abroad.[86] The image of Polish exiles in Siberia contributed to the powerful image of imperial misrule, encompassing both the violent suppression of calls for political rights as well as the image of Siberia as a vast and brutal wasteland. The perceptions of eastern despotism associated with images of Siberia alongside the tightly controlled knowledge of dissent and spaces of imprisonment in the British Empire ensured that Russian revolutionaries received sympathy and attention in Britain and America, whereas opponents of British imperial rule could not.[87]

Stepniak and Volkhovskii also presented opposition to Russian imperial rule as exceptional:

> 'Everything that affects the fate of Russia depends on what is done in Russia by Russians. The work abroad is no exception to this rule. Nay, we may even say that the efficacy – the very possibility – of the movement abroad depends on the existence of an active protest in Russia. Who is interested in the question of, say, Turkish or Persian liberty, when the Turks and Persians in no way show themselves discontented?'[88]

Through their efforts to present the Russian Empire as other, Stepniak and Volkhovskii contributed further to narratives which justified the use of terrorism by Russian revolutionaries. The language of anti-imperialism was used, but framed in terms of just and unjust empire, appealing to a wider audience among their British sympathisers.

When living in Britain, Stepniak and Volkhovskii tended to ignore or negate the discomfiting ramifications of British imperial rule for social and economic justice. Ireland, for example, had long been seen by socialists, including Marx and Engels, as the place where revolution would first erupt.[89] In 1881, Stepniak published two articles in the journal *Delo* (*The Cause*) describing the experience of the Irish under British rule.[90] While he clearly considered aspects of British rule in Ireland to be unjust, he later rejected comparisons between Ireland and Russia.[91] He argued that the Irish people had political representation, negating Irish revolutionaries' comparisons of their situation to Poland to argue against British rule.[92] This enabled the claim that Irish revolutionaries were not entitled to use terrorism as they had political representation in the Westminster Parliament. While Volkhovskii acknowledged that the Russian government had improved the economic situation of the Polish peasant, the issue of political representation remained key:

> The Polish peasant wanted, besides a good economic position, also justice, personal liberty, liberty of conscience, some education, and the undisturbed use of his native language. But these clashed with the levelling tendencies of the Russian autocratic and bureaucratic

[85] Luke Kelly, 'British Humanitarianism and the Russian Famine, 1891-2', *Historical Research*, vol. 89, no. 246 (2016), pp. 824-45

[86] Ben Phillips, '"A Nihilist Kurort": Siberian Exile in the Victorian Imagination, c .1830–1890', *Slavonic and East European Review*, vol. 97, no. 3 (2019), pp. 478-84

[87] Choi Chatterjee, 'Imperial Incarcerations: Ekaterina Breshko-Breshkovskaia, Vinayak Savarkar, and the Original Sins of Modernity', *Slavic Review*, vo. 74, no. 4 (2015), pp. 850-72

[88] Stepniak, 'Agitation Abroad', p. 78

[89] John Rodden, '"The lever must be applied in Ireland": Marx, Engels, and the Irish Question', *Review of Politics*, vol. 70, no. 4 (2008), pp. 609-40

[90] B. [S.M. Kravchinskii], 'Irlandskie dela', *Delo*, no. 8, 1881, pp. 149-177 and no. 9, 1881, pp. 195-217

[91] 'The Explosions from a Revolutionary Point of View', *Bristol Mercury and Daily Post*, 27 January 1885

[92] See: Rósín Healy, *Poland in the Irish Nationalist Imagination, 1772–1922: Anti-Colonialism within Europe* (London, 2017)

> imperialism. The Russian Government therefore introduced the Russian language instead of the Polish in the proceedings of the courts, and in the educational system, and it began to persecute the Roman Catholics as such. Thus, while supporting the peasants against the nobility so far as it was necessary for the purposes of conquest, the Russian Government acted utterly against their interest outside those limits.[93]

The emphasis on popular representation further enabled the representation of the Russian Empire as a uniquely oppressive political environment.

Although Stepniak and Volkhovskii largely dismissed ongoing events in Ireland, emerging ideas concerning the place of Ireland in the British Empire provided a vocabulary and model for conceptualising the place of Poland in the Russian Empire. Stepniak first employed the term 'Home Rule' in *The Russian Storm-Cloud*, which appeared in print the same year as the introduction of the first Home Rule Bill to the Westminster Parliament.[94] Stepniak saw Home Rule as the solution to the Irish question.[95] Home Rule for Ireland was a contentious issue among British Liberals in 1886, supported by the prime minister Gladstone, but opposed by many in the party and among its supporters.[96] Members of the Liberal Party, including several MPs, and the National Liberal Federation sympathised with the Russian revolutionary cause and, from 1890, in the Society of Friends of Russian Freedom. The Society's president Robert Spence Watson was a leading figure of the National Liberal Federation when the principle of Home Rule became a key element of the parliamentary party's political programme in 1890.[97] Use of the term to refer to Poland seems to have drawn on these contemporary debates and the later influence of Spence Watson in the Society of Friends of Russian Freedom suggests the affinity of Liberals to Stepniak and Volkhovskii's campaigning on behalf of the Russian revolutionary cause.

Like Ireland, Poland was not envisaged as seceding from this new structure. Indeed, Stepniak believed that it was economically unthinkable for Poland to leave the empire.[98] Panslavism became, for Stepniak and Volkhovskii, the grounds for understanding the territorial and political formation of the new state. Stepniak believed that Finland, the Caucasus, and Central Asia had 'nothing to do with Russia' and would likely seek independence from the empire. The remaining 'independent states of Slav origin' would form a part of the new state, although it could not be centralised due to the historical impact of imperial rule.[99] Stepniak cautioned against confusing Panslavism with its bureaucratic and autocratic forms, which he identified in the Slavophil tendencies of some officials to attempt to prevent and reverse and Western influence on Russia.[100] The articulation of economic benefit as well as associating the positive aspects of Panslavism with the intelligentsia, as opposed to the state, indicated the foundation of the new state on voluntary membership, as opposed to a nationalist emphasis on the historical claims to such territories.

As for Russian political thinkers across the left and centre and of the political spectrum, the British Empire sometimes provided a point of comparison, as well as an example to be imitated. However, in Stepniak and Volkhovskii's writings, and particularly in *Free Russia*, they ignored many aspects of British imperial rule in their published writings. This silence is notable, particularly in light of their critique of Russian imperial rule in Finland,

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[93] Volkhovsky, 'Introduction', in von Samson-Himmelstierna, *Russia under Alexander III*, xii-xiii
[94] Stepniak, *Russian Storm-Cloud*, pp. 88-89
[95] Ibid., p. 212
[96] Eugenio Federico Biagini, 'Home Rule for Ireland', p. 266
[97] Eugenio F. Biagini, *British Democracy and Irish Nationalism, 1876-1906* (Cambridge, 2007), p. 187
[98] Stepniak, *Russian Storm-Cloud*, pp. 87-8
[99] Stepniak, *Russian Storm-Cloud*, pp. 86-8
[100] Stepniak, *King Stork*, Vol.1, pp. 25-7

the Caucasus, and Central Asia. While the vocabulary of Home Rule provided a convenient language with which to describe the organisation of the Russian Empire, it is clear that Stepniak and Volkhovskii presented a vision which was based on Russian otherness to Britain. Their focus on political representation led to their proposals for a federal structure for the empire and complemented their justifications of Russian revolutionary terrorism. Their vision of membership of this new federal structure relied on a shared culture, drawing on the tradition of Panslavism, but also depicted the intelligentsia as the legitimate representatives of this culture. This definition of empire drew on liberal notions of the civilising mission, yet also rooted the future of the Russian Empire in its specific characteristics.

Conclusions

Britain provided an example to which Stepniak and Volkhovskii measured Russia in the writings in emigration. These comparisons helped them to publicise their cause as well as define the scope of legitimate terrorism. While Britain compared favourably to Russia in their writings, they did not intend to create a system in its image in Russia. They identified significant inequalities which they believed would also be reformed in Britain. Violence retained its central place in their thought. However, the conscious othering both of the Russian regime as well as revolutionary terrorism rendered it less controversial to their foreign sympathisers. The existence of representative political institutions acted as a safety valve for social and economic discontent in Britain. While their ideas do not seem to have undergone significant changes in emigration, opportunities to write enabled them to articulate their ideas in greater depth. Their emphasis on the role of the middle classes and local government as the foundation of democracy does indicate some developments. The definition of those who would participate in the revolution became broader and the political revolution shifted location from the national to the local scale.

Examining the writings of Stepniak and Volkhovskii on empire has only emphasised the importance of decentralisation and local self-government in their thought. In emigration, they did not seek to criticise empire in general terms, and it seems that had they done so, they might have dissuaded many of their British sympathisers. Instead, they presented a vision of imperial misrule which emphasised the unique qualities of Russian imperial despotism. Remaining silent with regard to contemporary debates and controversies concerning the British Empire, they again sought to emphasise Russia's difference. Yet, at the same time, the contemporary discourse of Home Rule for Ireland provided them with a vocabulary with which to detail their plans for the reorganisation of empire. Additionally, their plans for the post-revolutionary empire drew on Panslavism yet rooted it in the intelligentsia with a focus on education and social activism. Their proposals for empire thus represented a complex blend of different ideas, aiming to resolve many of the inherent tensions of the multi-ethnic and multi-national Russian Empire.

By embracing popular images of Russia and tsarist regime as backward and barbaric, Stepniak and Volkhovskii were able to make the Russian revolutionary cause comprehensible to their British sympathisers, who provided the support needed in order for their ideas and activism to flourish in emigration. As a result, their ideas would continue to shape Russian revolutionary thought and British perceptions of Russia to the outbreak of war in 1914.

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